

Dr. Paul Schaeffer (NY Secretary of State)  
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# Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Chauncey Depew

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
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LEAVES FROM MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By Chauncey M. Depew

(Portions deal with Abraham Lincoln)

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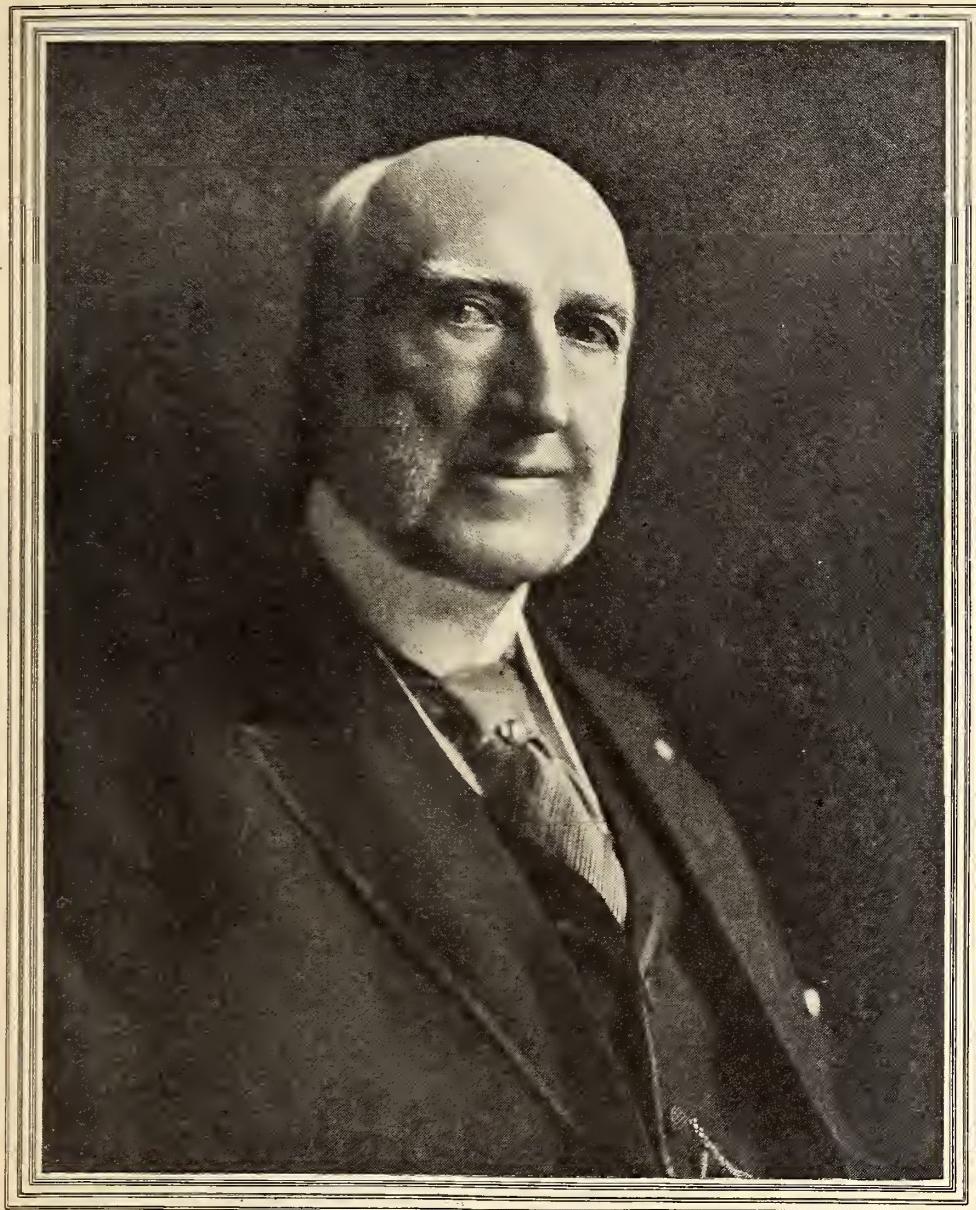
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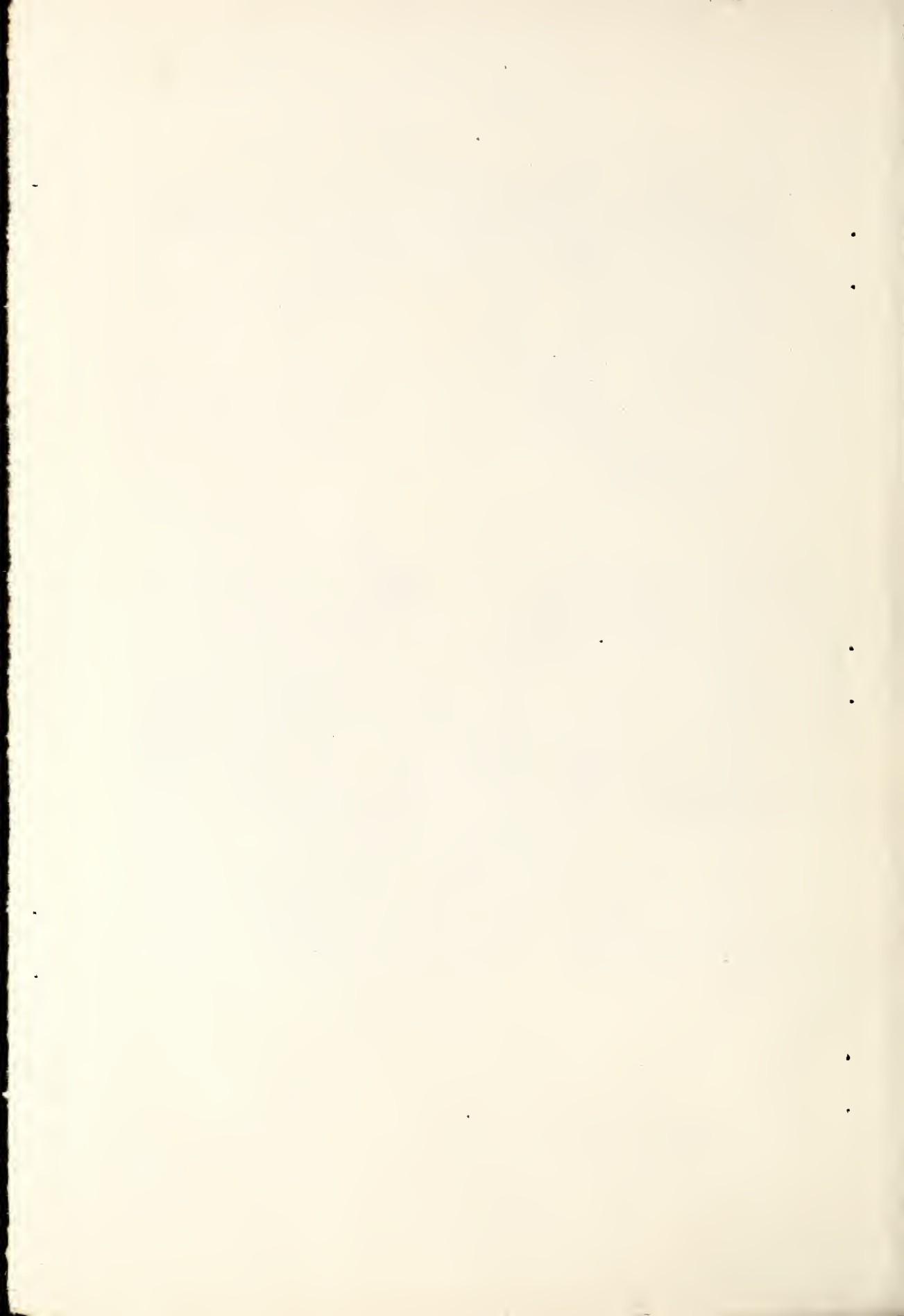
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CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW.

On his eighty-sixth birthday.



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## LEAVES FROM MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH—IN PUBLIC LIFE—ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
BY CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW

### CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Y memory goes back for more than eighty years. I recall distinctly when about five years old my mother took me to the school of Mrs. Westbrook, wife of the well-known pastor of the Dutch Reformed church, who had a school in her house, within a few doors. The lady was a highly educated woman, and her husband, Doctor Westbrook, a man of letters as well as a preacher. He specialized in ancient history, and the interest he aroused in Roman and Greek culture and achievements has continued with me ever since.

The village of Peekskill at that time had between two and three thousand inhabitants. Its people were nearly all Revolutionary families who had settled there in colonial times. There had been very little immigration either from other States or abroad; acquaintance was universal, and in the activities of the churches there was general co-operation among the members. Church attendance was so unanimous that people, young or old, who failed to be in their accustomed places on Sunday felt the disapproval of the community.

Social activities of the village were very simple, but very delightful and healthful. There were no very rich nor very poor. Nearly every family owned its own house or was on the way to acquire one. Mis-

fortune of any kind aroused common interest and sympathy. A helping hand of neighborliness was always extended to those in trouble or distress. Peekskill was a happy community, and presented conditions of life and living of common interest and sympathy not possible in these days of restless crowds and fierce competition.

The Peekskill Academy was the dominant educational institution, and drew students not only from the village but from a distance. It fitted them for college, and I was a student there for about twelve years. The academy was a character-making institution, though it lacked the thoroughness of the New England preparatory schools. Its graduates entering into the professions or business had an unusual record of success in life. I do not mean that they accumulated great fortunes, but they acquired independence and were prominent and useful citizens in all localities where they settled.

I graduated from the Peekskill Academy in 1852. I find on the programme of the exercises of that day, which some old student preserved, that I was down for several original speeches, while the other boys had mainly recitations. Apparently my teachers had decided to develop any oratorical talent I might possess.

I entered Yale in 1852 and graduated in 1856. The college of that period was very primitive compared with the university to which it has grown. Our class of ninety-seven was regarded as unu-

sually large. The classics and mathematics, Greek and Latin were the dominant features of instruction. Athletics had not yet appeared, though rowing and boat-racing came in during my term. The outstanding feature of the institution was the literary societies: the Linonia and the Brothers of Unity. The debates at the weekly meetings were kept up and maintained upon a high and efficient plane. Both societies were practically deliberative bodies and discussed with vigor the current questions of the day. Under this training Yale sent out an unusual number of men who became eloquent preachers, distinguished physicians, and famous lawyers. While the majority of students now on leaving college enter business or professions like engineering, which is allied to business, at that time nearly every young man was destined for the ministry, law, or medicine. My own class furnished two of the nine judges of the Supreme Court of the United States, and a large majority of those who were admitted to the bar attained judicial honors. It is a singular commentary on the education of that time that the students who won the highest honors and carried off the college prizes, which could only be done by excelling in Latin, Greek, and mathematics, were far outstripped in after-life by their classmates who fell below their high standard of collegiate scholarship but were distinguished for an all-around interest in subjects not features in the college curriculum.

My classmates Justice David J. Brewer and Justice Henry B. Brown were both eminent members of the Supreme Court of the United States. Brewer was distinguished for the wide range of his learning and illuminating addresses on public occasions. He was bicentennial orator of the college and a most acceptable one. Wayne MacVeagh, afterwards attorney-general of the United States, one of the leaders of the bar, also one of the most brilliant orators of his time, was in college with me, though not a classmate. Andrew D. White, whose genius, scholarship, and organization enabled Ezra Cornell to found Cornell University, was another of my college mates. He became one of the most famous of our diplomats and the

author of many books of permanent value. My friendship with MacVeagh and White continued during their lives, that is, for nearly sixty years. MacVeagh was one of the readiest and most attractive of speakers I ever knew. He had a very sharp and caustic wit, which made him exceedingly popular as an after-dinner speaker and as a host in his own house. He made every evening when he entertained, for those who were fortunate enough to be his guests, an occasion memorable in their experience.

John Mason Brown, of Kentucky, became afterwards the leader of the bar in his State, and was about to receive from President Harrison an appointment as justice of the Supreme Court when he died suddenly. If he had been appointed it would have been a remarkable circumstance that three out of nine judges of the greatest of courts, an honor which is sought by every one of the hundreds of thousands of lawyers in the United States, should have been from the same college and the same class.

The faculty lingers in my memory, and I have the same reverence and affection for its members, though sixty-five years out of college, that I had the day I graduated. Our president, Theodore D. Woolsey, was a wonderful scholar and a most inspiring teacher. Yale has always been fortunate in her presidents, and peculiarly so in Professor Woolsey. He had personal distinction, and there was about him an air of authority and reserved power which awed the most radical and rebellious student, and at the same time he had the respect and affection of all. In his historical lectures he had a standard joke on the Chinese, the narration of which amused him the more with each repetition. It was that when a Chinese army was beleaguered and besieged in a fortress their provisions gave out and they decided to escape. They selected a very dark night, threw open the gates, and as they marched out each soldier carried a lighted lantern.

In the faculty were several professors of remarkable force and originality. The professor of Greek, Mr. Hadley, father of the distinguished ex-president of Yale, was more than his colleagues in the

thought and talk of the undergraduates. His learning and pre-eminence in his department were universally admitted. He had a caustic wit and his sayings were the current talk of the campus. He maintained discipline, which was quite lax in those days, by the exercise of this ability. Some of the boys once drove a calf into the recitation-room. Professor Hadley quietly remarked: "You will take out that animal. We will get along today with our usual number." It is needless to say that no such experiment was ever repeated.

At one time there was brought up in the faculty meeting a report that one of the secret societies was about to bore an artesian well in the cellar of their clubhouse. It was suggested that such an extraordinary expense should be prohibited. Professor Hadley closed the discussion and laughed out the subject by saying from what he knew of the society, if it would hold a few sessions over the place where the artesian well was projected, the boring would be accomplished without cost. The professor was a sympathetic and very wise adviser to the students. If any one was in trouble he would always go to him and give most helpful relief.

Professor Larned inspired among the students a discriminating taste for the best English literature and an ardent love for its classics. Professor Thacher was one of the most robust and vigorous thinkers and teachers of his period. He was a born leader of men, and generation after generation of students who graduated carried into after-life the effects of his teaching and personality. We all loved Professor Olmstead, though we were not vitally interested in his department of physics and biology. He was a purist in his department, and so confident of his principles that he thought it unnecessary to submit them to practical tests. One of the students, whose room was immediately over that of the professor, took up a plank from the flooring, and by boring a very small hole in the ceiling found that he could read the examination papers on the professor's desk. The information of this reaching the faculty, the professor was asked if he had examined the ceiling. He said that

was unnecessary, because he had measured the distance between the ceiling and the surface of his desk and found that the line of vision connected so far above that nothing could be read on the desk.

Timothy Dwight, afterwards president, was then a tutor. Learning, common sense, magnetism, and all-around good-fellowship were wonderfully united in President Dwight. He was the most popular instructor and best loved by the boys. He had a remarkable talent for organization, which made him an ideal president. He possessed the rare faculty of commanding and convincing not only the students but his associates in the faculty and the members of the corporation when discussing and deciding upon business propositions and questions of policy.

The final examinations over, commencement day arrived. The literary exercises and the conferring of degrees took place in the old Center Church. I was one of the speakers and selected for my subject "The Hudson River and Its Traditions." I was saturated from early association and close investigation and reading with the crises of the Revolutionary War, which were successfully decided on the patriots' side on the banks of the Hudson. I lived near Washington Irving, and his works I knew by heart, especially the tales which gave to the Hudson a romance like the Rhine's. The subject was new for an academic stage, and the speech made a hit. Nevertheless, it was the saddest and most regretful day of my life when I left Yale.

My education, according to the standard of the time, was completed, and my diploma was its evidence. It has been a very interesting question with me how much the academy and the college contributed to that education. Their discipline was necessary and their training essential. Four years of association with the faculty, learned, finely equipped, and sympathetic, was a wonderful help. The free associations of the secret and debating societies, the campus, and the sports were invaluable, and the friendships formed with congenial spirits added immensely to the pleasures and compensations of a long life.

In connection with this I may add that, as it has been my lot in the peculiar position which I have occupied for more than half a century as counsel and adviser for a great corporation and its creators and the many successful men of business who have surrounded them, I have learned to know how men who have been denied in their youth the opportunities for education feel when they are in possession of fortunes, and the world seems at their feet. Then they painfully recognize their limitations, then they know their weakness, then they understand that there are things which money cannot buy, and that there are gratifications and triumphs which no fortune can secure. The one lament of all those men has been: "Oh, if I had been educated! I would sacrifice all that I have to obtain the opportunities of the college, to be able to sustain not only conversation and discussion with the educated men with whom I come in contact, but competent also to enjoy what I see is a delight to them beyond anything which I know."

But I recall gratefully other influences quite as important to one's education. My father was a typical business man, one of the pioneers of river transportation between our village and New York, and also a farmer and a merchant. He was a stern man, devoted to his family, and, while a strict disciplinarian, very fond of his children.

My mother was a woman of unusual intellect bordering upon genius. There were no means of higher education at that period, but her father, who was an eminent lawyer, and her grandfather, a judge, finding her so receptive, educated her with the care that was given to boys who were intended for a professional life. She was well versed in the literature of the time of Queen Elizabeth and Queen Anne, and, with a retentive memory, knew by heart many of the English classics. She wrote well, but never for publication. Added to these accomplishments were rare good sense and prophetic vision. The foundation and much of the superstructure of all that I have and all that I am were her work. She was a rigid Calvinist, and one of her many lessons has been of inestimable comfort

to me. Several times in my life I have met with heavy misfortunes and what seemed irreparable losses. I have returned home to find my mother with wise advice and suggestions ready to devote herself to the reconstruction of my fortune, and to brace me up. She always said what she thoroughly believed: "My son, this which you think so great a calamity is really divine discipline. The Lord has sent it to you for your own good, because in His infinite wisdom He saw that you needed it. I am absolutely certain that if you submit instead of repining and protesting, if you will ask with faith and proper spirit for guidance and help, they both will come to you and with greater blessings than you ever had before." That faith of my mother inspired and intensified my efforts and in every instance her predictions proved true.

Every community has a public-spirited citizen who unselfishly devotes himself or herself to the public good. That citizen of Peekskill in those early days was Doctor James Brewer. He had accumulated a modest competence sufficient for his simple needs as bachelor. He was either the promoter or among the leaders of all the movements for betterment of the town. He established a circulating library upon most liberal terms, and it became an educational institution of benefit. The books were admirably selected, and the doctor's advice to readers was always available. His taste ran to the English classics, and he had all the standard authors in poetry, history, fiction, and essay.

No pleasure derived in reading in after-years gave me such delight as the Waverley Novels. I think I read through that library and some of it several times over.

The excitement as the novels of Dickens and Thackeray began to appear equalled almost the enthusiasm of a political campaign. Each one of those authors had ardent admirers and partisans. The characters of Dickens became household companions. Every one was looking for the counterpart of Macawber or Sam Weller, Pecksniff or David Copperfield, and had little trouble in finding them either in the family circle or among the neighbors.

Dickens's lectures in New York, which consisted of readings from his novels, were an event which has rarely been duplicated for interest. With high dramatic ability he brought out before the audience the characters from his novels with whom all were familiar. Every one in the crowd had an idealistic picture in his mind of the actors of the story. It was curious to note that the presentation which the author gave coincided with the idea of the majority of his audience. I was fresh from the country but had with me that evening a rather ultrafashionable young lady. She said she was not interested in the lecture because it represented the sort of people she did not know and never expected to meet; they were a very common lot. In her subsequent career in this country and abroad she had to her credit three matrimonial adventures and two divorces, but none of her husbands were of the common lot.

Speaking of Dickens, one picture remains indelibly pressed upon my memory. It was the banquet given him at which Horace Greeley presided. Everybody was as familiar with Mr. Pickwick and his portrait by Cruikshank in Dickens's works as with one's father. When Mr. Greeley arose to make the opening speech and introduce the guest of the evening, his likeness to this portrait of Pickwick was so remarkable that the whole audience, including Mr. Dickens, shouted their delight in greeting an old and well-beloved friend.

Another educational opportunity came in my way because one of my uncles was postmaster of the village. Through his post-office came several high-class magazines and foreign reviews. There was no rural delivery in those days, and the mail could only be had on personal application, and the result was that the subscribers of these periodicals frequently left them a long time before they were called for. I was an omnivorous reader of everything available, and as a result these publications, especially the foreign reviews, became a fascinating source of information and culture. They gave from the first minds of the century criticisms of current literature and expositions of political movements and public men

which became of infinite value in after-years.

Another unincorporated and yet valuable school was the frequent sessions at the drug-store of the elder statesmen of the village. On certain evenings these men, representing most of the activities of the village, would avail themselves of the hospitable chairs about the stove and discuss not only local matters but the general conditions of the country, some of them revolving about the constitutionality of various measures which had been proposed and enacted into laws. They nearly all related to slavery, the compromise measures, the introduction of slaves into new territories, the fugitive-slave law, and were discussed with much intelligence and information. The boys heard them talked about in their homes and were eager listeners on the outskirts of this village congress. Such institutions are not possible except in the universal acquaintance, fellowship, and confidences of village and country life. They were the most important factors in forming that public opinion, especially among the young, which supported Mr. Lincoln in his successful efforts to save the Union at whatever cost.

A few days after returning home from Yale I entered the office of Edward Wells, a lawyer of the village, as a student. Mr. Wells had attained high rank in his profession, was a profound student of the law, and had a number of young men, fitting them for the bar under his direction.

I was admitted to the bar in 1858, and immediately opened an office in the village. My first client was a prosperous farmer who wanted an opinion on a rather complicated question. I prepared the case with great care. He asked me what my fee was, and I told him five dollars. He said: "A dollar and seventy-five is enough for a young lawyer like you." Subsequently he submitted the case to one of the most eminent lawyers in New York, who came to the same conclusion and charged him five hundred dollars. On account of this gentleman's national reputation the farmer thought that fee was very reasonable. In subsequent years I have received several very large retainers, but none of them gave

so much satisfaction as that dollar and seventy-five cents, which I had actually earned after having been so long dependent on my father.

After some years of private practice Commodore Vanderbilt sent for me and offered the attorneyship for the New York and Harlem Railroad. I had just been nominated and confirmed United States minister to Japan. The appointment was a complete surprise to me, as I was not an applicant for any federal position. The salary was seven thousand five hundred dollars and an outfit of nine thousand. The commodore's offer of the attorneyship for the Harlem Railroad, which was his first venture in railroading, was far less than the salary as minister. When I said this to the commodore, he remarked: "Railroads are the career for a young man; there is nothing in politics. Don't be a damned fool." That decided me, and on the 1st of January, 1921, I rounded out fifty-five years in the railway service of this corporation and its allied lines.

Nothing has impressed me more than little things, and apparently immaterial ones, which have influenced the careers of many people. My father and his brothers, all active business men, were also deeply interested in politics, not on the practical side, but in policies and governmental measures. They were uncompromising Democrats of the most conservative type; they believed that interference with slavery of any kind imperilled the union of the States, and that the union of the States was the sole salvation of the perpetuity of the republic and its liberties. I went to Yale saturated with these ideas. Yale was a favorite college for Southern people. There was a large element from the slaveholding States among the students. It was so considerable that these Southerners withdrew from the great debating societies of the college and formed a society of their own, which they called the Calliopean. Outside of these Southerners there were very few Democrats among the students, and I came very near being drawn into the Calliopean, but happily escaped.

The slavery question in all its phases of fugitive-slave law and its enforcement, the extension of slavery into the new

territories, or its prohibition, and of the abolition of the institution by purchase or confiscation were subjects of discussion on the campus, in the literary societies, and in frequent lectures in the halls in New Haven by the most prominent and gifted speakers and advocates.

That was a period when even in the most liberal churches the pulpit was not permitted to preach politics, and slavery was pre-eminently politics. But according to an old New England custom, the pastor was given a free hand on Thanksgiving Day to unburden his mind of everything which had been bubbling and seething there for a year. One of the most eminent and eloquent of New England preachers was the Reverend Doctor Bacon, of Center Church, New Haven. His Thanksgiving sermon was an event eagerly anticipated by the whole college community. He was violently antislavery. His sermons were not only intently listened to but widely read, and their effect in promoting antislavery sentiment was very great.

The result of several years of these associations and discussions converted me, and I became a Republican on the principles enunciated in the first platform of the party in 1856. When I came home from Yale the situation in the family became very painful, because my father was an intense partisan. He had for his party both faith and love, and was shocked and grieved at his son's change of principles. He could not avoid constantly discussing the question, and was equally hurt either by opposition or silence.

#### IN PUBLIC LIFE

THE campaign of 1856 created an excitement in our village which had never been known since the Revolutionary War. The old families who had been settled there since colonial days were mainly proslavery and Democratic, while the Republican party was recruited very largely from New England men and in a minority.

Several times in our national political campaigns there has been one orator who drew audiences and received public attention and reports in the newspapers beyond all other speakers. On the Democratic side during that period Horatio

Seymour was pre-eminent. On the Republican side in the State of New York the attractive figure was George William Curtis. His books were very popular, his charming personality, the culture and the elevation of his speeches put him in a class by himself.

The Republicans of the village were highly elated when they had secured the promise of Mr. Curtis to speak at their most important mass-meeting. The occasion drew together the largest audience the village had known, composed not only of residents but many from a distance. The committee of arrangements finally reported to the waiting audience that the last train had arrived, but Mr. Curtis had not come.

It suddenly occurred to the committee that it would be a good thing to call a young recruit from a well-known Democratic family and publicly commit him. First came the invitation, then the shouting, and when I arose they cried "platform," and I was escorted to the platform, but had no idea of making a speech. My experience for years at college and at home had saturated me with the questions at issue in all their aspects. From a full heart, and a sore one, I poured out a confession of faith. I thought I had spoken only a few minutes, but found afterwards that it was over an hour. The local committee wrote to the State committee about the meeting, and in a few days I received a letter from the chairman of the State committee inviting me to fill a series of engagements covering the whole State of New York.

The campaign of 1856 differed from all others in memory of men then living. The issues between the parties appealed on the Republican side to the young. There had grown up among the young voters an intense hostility to slavery. The moral force of the arguments against the institution captured them. They had no hostility to the South, nor to the Southern slaveholders; they regarded their position as an inheritance, and were willing to help on the lines of Mr. Lincoln's original idea of purchasing the slaves and freeing them. But the suggestion had no friends among the slaveholders. These young men believed that any extension or strengthening of the institution would be disastrous to the

country. The threatened dissolution of the Union, secession, or rebellion did not frighten them.

I was elected to the assembly, the popular branch of the New York Legislature, in 1861. I was nominated during an absence from the State, without being a candidate or knowing of it until my return. Of course I could expect nothing from my father, and my own earnings were not large, so I had to rely upon a personal canvass of a district which had been largely spoiled by rich candidates running against each other and spending large amounts of money. I made a hot canvass, speaking every day, and with an investment of less than one hundred dollars for travel and other expenses I was triumphantly elected.

By far the most interesting member of the legislature was the speaker, Henry J. Raymond. He was one of the most remarkable men I ever met. During the session I became intimate with him, and the better I knew him the more I became impressed with his genius, the variety of his attainments, the perfection of his equipment, and his ready command of all his powers and resources. Raymond was then editor of the *New York Times* and contributed a leading article every day. He was the best debater we had and the most convincing. I have seen him often, when some other member was in the chair of the committee of the whole and we were discussing a critical question, take his seat on the floor and commence writing editorial. As the debate progressed, he would rise and participate. When he had made his point, which he always did with directness and lucidity, he would resume writing his editorial. The debate would usually end with Mr. Raymond carrying his point and also finishing his editorial, an example which seems to refute the statement of metaphysicians that two parts of the mind cannot work at the same time.

In 1862 I was candidate for re-election to the assembly. Political conditions had so changed that they were almost reversed. The enthusiasm of the war which had carried the Republicans into power the year before had been succeeded by general unrest. Our armies had been defeated, and industrial and commercial depression was general.

The election had reversed the overwhelming Republican majority in the legislature of the year before by making the assembly a tie. I was re-elected, but by reduced majority.

The Democrats of the assembly and also of the State were determined that Mr. Callicot should not enjoy the speakership. They started investigations in the House and movements in the courts to prevent him from taking his seat. The result was that I became acting speaker and continued as such until Mr. Callicot had defeated his enemies and taken his place as speaker in the latter part of the session.

I was also chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means and the leader of the House.

The political situation, which had been so desperate for the national administration, changed rapidly for the better with the victory at Gettysburg, which forced General Lee out of Pennsylvania and back into Virginia, and also by General Grant's wonderful series of victories at Vicksburg and other places which liberated the Mississippi River.

Under these favorable conditions the Republicans entered upon the canvass in the fall of 1863 to reverse, if possible, the Democratic victory the year before. The Republican State ticket was:

Secretary of State.....Chauncey M. Depew.  
Comptroller.....Lucius Robinson.  
Canal Commissioner.....Benjamin F. Bruce.  
Treasurer.....George W. Schuyler.  
State Engineer.....William B. Taylor.  
Prison Inspector.....James K. Bates.  
Judge of the Court of Appeals.....Henry S. Selden.  
Attorney-General.....John Cochran.

The canvass was one of the most interesting of political campaigns. The president was unusually active, and his series of letters were remarkable documents. He had the ear of the public, he commanded the front page of the press, and he defended his administration and its acts and replied to his enemies with skill, tact, and extreme moderation.

Public opinion was peculiar. Military disasters and increasing taxation had made the position of the administration very critical, but the victories which came during the summer changed the

situation. I have never known in any canvass any one incident which had greater effect than Sheridan's victory in the Shenandoah Valley, and never an adventure which so captured the popular imagination as his ride from Washington to the front; his rallying the retreating and routed troops, reforming them and turning defeat into victory. The poem "Sheridan's Ride" was recited in every audience, from every platform, and from the stage in many theatres, and created the wildest enthusiasm.

When I returned to New York (having campaigned for several weeks in Pennsylvania with Governor Curtin) to enter upon my own canvass, the State and national committees imposed upon me a heavy burden. Speakers of State reputation were few, while the people were clamoring for meetings. Fortunately I had learned how to protect my voice. In the course of the campaign every one who spoke with me lost his voice and had to return home for treatment. When I was a student at Yale the professor in elocution was an eccentric old gentleman named North. The boys paid little attention to him and were disposed to ridicule his peculiarities. He saw that I was specially anxious to learn and said: "The principal thing about oratory is to use your diaphragm instead of your throat." His lesson on that subject has been of infinite benefit to me all my life.

The programme laid out called upon me to speak on an average between six and seven hours a day. The speeches were from ten to thirty minutes at different railway-stations, and wound up with at least two meetings at some important towns in the evening, and each meeting demanded about an hour. These meetings were so arranged that they covered the whole State. It took about four weeks, but the result of the campaign, due to the efforts of the orators and other favorable conditions, ended in the reversal of the Democratic victory of the year before, a Republican majority of thirty thousand, and the control of the legislature.

When my term was about expiring with the year 1865 I decided to leave public life and resume the practice of my

profession. I was at the crossroads of a political or a professional career. So, while there was a general assent to my renomination, I emphatically stated the conclusion at which I had arrived.

In our country public life is a most uncertain career for a young man. Its duties and activities remove him from his profession or business and impose habits of work and thought which unfit him for ordinary pursuits, especially if he remains long in public service. With a change of administration or of party popularity, he may be at any time dropped and left hopelessly stranded. On the other hand, if his party is in power he has in it a position of influence and popularity. He has a host of friends, with many people dependent upon him for their own places, and it is no easy thing for him to retire.

When I had decided not to remain any longer in public life and return home, the convention of my old district, which I had represented in the legislature, renominated me for the old position with such earnestness and affection that it was very difficult to refuse and to persuade them that it was absolutely necessary for me to resume actively my profession.

Our village of Peekskill, which has since grown into the largest village in the State, with many manufacturing and other interests, was then comparatively small. A large number of people gathered at the post-office every morning. On one occasion when I arrived I found them studying a large envelope addressed to me, which the postmaster had passed around. It was a letter from William H. Seward, secretary of state, announcing that the president had appointed me United States minister to Japan, and that the appointment had been sent to the Senate and confirmed by that body, and directing that I appear at the earliest possible moment at his office to receive instructions and go to my post. A few days afterwards I received a beautiful letter from Henry J. Raymond, then in Congress, urging my acceptance.

On arriving in Washington I went to see Mr. Seward, who said to me: "I have special reasons for securing your appointment from the president. He is rewarding friends of his by putting them in

diplomatic positions for which they are wholly unfit. I regard the opening of Japan to commerce and our relations to that new and promising country so important, that I asked the privilege to select one whom I thought fitted for the position. Your youth, familiarity with public life, and ability seem to me ideal for this position, and I have no doubt you will accept."

I stated to him how necessary it was that after long neglect in public life of my private affairs that I should return to my profession, if I was to make a career, but Mr. Seward brushed that aside by reciting his own success, notwithstanding his long service in our State and in Washington. "However," he continued, "I feared that this might be your attitude, so I have made an appointment for you to see Mr. Burlingame, who has been our minister to China, and is now here at the head of a mission from China to the different nations of the world."

Anson Burlingame's career had been most picturesque and had attracted the attention not only of the United States but of Europe. As a member of the House of Representatives he had accepted the challenge of a "fire-eater," who had sent it under the general view that no Northern man would fight. As minister to China he had so gained the confidence of the Chinese Government that he persuaded them to open diplomatic relations with the Western world, and at their request he had resigned his position from the United States and accepted the place of ambassador to the Great Powers, and was at the head of a large delegation, composed of the most important, influential, and representative mandarins of the old empire.

When I sent up my card to his room at the hotel his answer was: "Come up immediately." He was shaving and had on the minimum of clothes permissible to receive a visitor. He was expecting me and started in at once with an eloquent description of the attractions and importance of the mission to Japan. With the shaving-brush in one hand and the razor in the other he delivered an oration. In order to emphasize it and have time to think and enforce a new idea, he would apply the brush and the razor vigorously, then pause and resume. I cannot re-

member his exact words, but have a keen recollection of the general trend of his argument.

He said: "I am surprised that a young man like you, unmarried, and with no social obligations, should hesitate for a moment to accept this most important and attractive position. If you think these people are barbarians, I can assure you that they had a civilization and a highly developed literature when our forefathers were painted savages. The western nations of Europe, in order to secure advantages in this newly opened country for commerce, have sent their ablest representatives. You will meet there with the diplomats of all the great western nations, and your intimacy with them will be a university of the largest opportunity. You will come in contact with the best minds of Europe. You can make a great reputation in the keen rivalry of this situation by securing the best of the trade of Japan for your own country to its western coasts over the waters of the Pacific. You will be welcomed by the Japanese Government, and the minister of foreign affairs will assign you a palace to live in, with a garden attached so perfectly appointed and kept as to have been the envy of Shenstone. You will be attended by hundreds of beautiful and accomplished Japanese maidens."

When I repeated to a large body of waiting office-seekers who had assembled in my room what Mr. Burlingame had said, they all became applicants for the place which eventually I decided not to accept.

President Andrew Johnson differed radically from any President of the United States whom it has been my good fortune to know. This refers to all from and including Mr. Lincoln to Mr. Harding. A great deal must be forgiven and a great deal taken by way of explanation when we consider his early environment and opportunities.

In the interviews I had with him he impressed me as a man of vigorous mentality, of obstinate wilfulness and overwhelming confidence in his own judgment and the courage of his convictions. His weakness was alcoholism. He made an exhibition of himself at the time of his inauguration and during the presidency,

and especially during his famous trip "around the circle" he was in a bad way.

He was of humble origin and, in fact, very poor. It is said of him that he could neither read nor write until his wife taught him. He made a great career both as a member of the House of Representatives and a senator, and was of unquestionable influence in each branch. With reckless disregard for his life, he kept east Tennessee in the Union during the Civil War.

General Grant told me a story of his own experience with him. Johnson, he said, had always been treated with such contempt and ignored socially by the members of the old families and slave aristocracy of the South that his resentment against them was vindictive, and so after the surrender at Appomattox he was constantly proclaiming "Treason is odious and must be punished." He also wanted and, in fact, insisted upon ignoring Grant's parole to the Confederate officers, in order that they might be tried for treason. On this question of maintaining his parole and his military honor General Grant was inflexible, and said he would appeal not only to Congress but to the country.

One day a delegation, consisting of the most eminent, politically, socially, and in family descent, of the Southern leaders, went to the White House. They said: "Mr. President, we have never recognized you, as you belong to an entirely different class from ourselves, but it is the rule of all countries and in all ages that supreme power vested in the individual raises him, no matter what his origin, to supreme leadership. You are now President of the United States, and by virtue of your office our leader, and we recognize you as such." Then followed attention from these people whom he admired and envied, as well as hated, of hospitality and deference, of which they were past masters. It captivated him and changed his whole attitude towards them.

He sent for General Grant and said to him: "The war is over and there should be forgiveness and reconciliation. I propose to call upon all of the States recently in rebellion to send to Washington their United States senators and members of the House, the same as they did before the war. If the present Congress will not

Department of State  
Washington, 11<sup>th</sup> Dec, 1865

My dear Sir:

I have received your letter of the 14<sup>th</sup> instant, in which you make known to me your purpose to decline the appointment of Minister to Japan which the President has been pleased to tender you. In reply, I have to inform you that it is with sincere regret that I learn that you have determined to deprive the government of the advantage it would derive from your services in that country, and I beg that you will accept my grateful acknowledgments for the kind expressions of your regard.

With my best wishes for your happiness and success,

Yours, My dear Sir,

Very faithfully yours

Wm. H. Seward

The Honorable  
Lucius M. Depew  
Secretary of State Albany, N.Y.

admit them, a Congress can be formed of these Southern senators and members of the House and of such Northern senators and representatives as will believe that I am right and acting under the Constitution. As President of the United States, I will recognize that Congress and communicate with them as such. As general of the army I want your support." General Grant replied: "That will create civil war, because the North will undoubtedly recognize the Congress as it now exists, and that Congress will assert itself in every way possible." "In that case," said the president, "I want the army to support the constitutional Congress which I am recognizing." General Grant said: "On the contrary, so far as my authority goes, the army will support the Congress as it is now and disperse the other." President Johnson then ordered General Grant to Mexico on a mission, and as he had no power to send a general of the army out of the United States, Grant refused to go.

Shortly afterwards Grant received a very confidential communication from General Sherman, stating that he had been ordered to Washington to take command of the army, and wanted to know what it meant. General Grant explained the situation, whereupon General Sherman announced to the president that he would take exactly the same position as General Grant had. The president then dropped the whole subject.

#### ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE secretaryship of the State of New York is a very delightful office. Its varied duties are agreeable, and the incumbent is brought in close contact with the State administration, the legislature, and the people.

We had in the secretary of state's office at the time I held the office, about fifty-eight years ago, very interesting archives. The office had been the repository of these documents since the organization of the government. Many years afterwards they were removed to the State Library. Among these documents were ten volumes of autograph letters from General Washington to Governor Clinton and others, covering the campaign on the Hudson in the effort by the enemy to capture West Point, the treason of Arnold, and nearly

the whole of the Revolutionary War. In the course of years before these papers were removed to the State Library, a large part of them disappeared. It was not the fault of the administration succeeding me, but it was because the legislature, in its effort to economize, refused to make appropriation for the proper care of these invaluable historic papers. Most of Washington's letters were written entirely in his own hand, and one wonders at the phenomenal industry which enabled him to do so much writing while continuously and laboriously engaged in active campaigning.

In view of the approaching presidential election, the legislature passed a law, which was signed by the governor, providing machinery for the soldiers' vote. New York had at that time between three and four hundred thousand soldiers in the field, who were scattered in companies, regiments, brigades, and divisions all over the South. This law made it the duty of the secretary of state to provide ballots, to see that they reached every unit of a company, to gather the votes and transmit them to the home of each soldier. The State government had no machinery by which this work could be done. I applied to the express companies, but all refused on the ground that they were not equipped. I then sent for old John Butterfield, who was the founder of the express business but had retired and was living on his farm near Utica. He was intensely patriotic and ashamed of the lack of enterprise shown by the express companies. He said to me: "If they cannot do this work they ought to retire." He at once organized what was practically an express company, taking in all those in existence and adding many new features for the sole purpose of distributing the ballots and gathering the soldiers' votes. It was a gigantic task and successfully executed by this patriotic old gentleman.

Of course, the first thing was to find out where the New York troops were, and for that purpose I went to Washington, remaining there for several months before the War Department would give me the information. The secretary of war was Edwin M. Stanton. It was perhaps fortunate that the secretary of war should not only possess extraordinary

executive ability, but be also practically devoid of human weakness; that he should be a rigid disciplinarian and administer justice without mercy. It was thought at the time that these qualities were necessary to counteract, as far as possible, the tender-heartedness of President Lincoln. If the boy condemned to be shot, or his mother or father, could reach the president in time, he was never executed. The military authorities thought that this was a mistaken charity and weakened discipline. I was at a dinner after the war with a number of generals who had been in command of armies. The question was asked one of the most famous of these generals: "How did you carry out the sentences of your court martials and escape Lincoln's pardons?" The grim old warrior answered: "I shot them first."

I took my weary way every day to the War Department, but could get no results. The interviews were brief and disagreeable and the secretary of war very brusque. The time was getting short. I said to the secretary: "If the ballots are to be distributed in time, I must have information at once." He very angrily refused and said: "New York troops are in every army, all over the enemy's territory. To state their location would be to give invaluable information to the enemy. How do I know if that information would be so safeguarded as not to get out?"

As I was walking down the long corridor, which was full of hurrying officers and soldiers returning from the field or departing for it, I met Elihu B. Washburne, who was a congressman from Illinois and an intimate friend of the president. He stopped me and said:

"Hello, Mr. Secretary, you seem very much troubled. Can I help you?" I told him my story.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. I answered: "To protect myself I must report to the people of New York that the provision for the soldiers' voting cannot be carried out because the administration refuses to give information where the New York soldiers are located."

"Why," said Mr. Washburne, "that would beat Mr. Lincoln. You don't know him. While he is a great statesman, he is also the keenest of politicians

alive. If it could be done in no other way, the president would take a carpet-bag and go around and collect those votes himself. You remain here until you hear from me. I will go at once and see the president."

In about an hour a staff officer stepped up to me and asked: "Are you the secretary of state of New York?" I answered "Yes." "The secretary of war wishes to see you at once," he said. I found the secretary most cordial and charming.

"Mr. Secretary, what do you desire?" he asked. I stated the case as I had many times before, and he gave a peremptory order to one of his staff that I should receive the documents in time for me to leave Washington on the midnight train.

The magical transformation was the result of a personal visit of President Lincoln to the secretary of war. Mr. Lincoln carried the State of New York by a majority of only 6,749, and it was a soldiers' vote that gave him the Empire State.

The compensations of my long delay in Washington trying to move the War Department were the opportunity it gave me to see Mr. Lincoln, to meet the members of the Cabinet, to become intimate with the New York delegation in Congress, and to hear the wonderful adventures and stories so numerous in Washington.

The White House at that time had no executive offices as now, and the machinery for executive business was very primitive. The east half of the second story had one large reception-room, in which the president could always be found, and a few rooms adjoining for his secretaries and clerks. The president had very little protection or seclusion. In the reception-room, which was always crowded at certain hours, could be found members of Congress, office-seekers, and an anxious company of fathers and mothers seeking pardons for their sons condemned for military offenses, or asking permission to go to the front, where a soldier boy was wounded or sick. Every one wanted something and wanted it very bad. The patient president, wearied as he was with cares of state, with the situation on several hostile fronts, with

the exigencies in Congress and jealousies in his Cabinet, patiently and sympathetically listened to these tales of want and woe. My position was unique. I was the only one in Washington who personally did not want anything, my mission being purely in the public interest.

I was a devoted follower of Mr. Seward, the secretary of state, and through the intimacies with officers in his department I learned from day to day the troubles in the Cabinet, so graphically described in the diary of Postmaster-General Gideon Welles.

The antagonism between Mr. Seward and Mr. Chase, the secretary of the treasury, though rarely breaking out in the open, was nevertheless acute. Mr. Seward was devoted to the president and made every possible effort to secure his renomination and election. Mr. Chase was doing his best to prevent Mr. Lincoln's renomination and secure it for himself.

No president ever had a Cabinet of which the members were so independent, had so large individual followings, and were so inharmonious. The president's sole ambition was to secure the ablest men in the country for the departments which he assigned to them without regard to their loyalty to himself. One of Mr. Seward's secretaries would frequently report to me the acts of disloyalty or personal hostility on the part of Mr. Chase with the lament: "The old man—meaning Lincoln—knows all about it and will not do a thing."

I had a long and memorable interview with the president. As I stepped from the crowd in his reception-room, he said to me: "What do you want?" I answered: "Nothing, Mr. President, I only came to pay my respects and bid you good-by, as I am leaving Washington." "It is such a luxury," he then remarked, "to find a man who does not want anything. I wish you would wait until I get rid of this crowd."

When we were alone he threw himself wearily on a lounge and was evidently greatly exhausted. Then he indulged, rocking backward and forward, in a reminiscent review of different crises in his administration, and how he had met them. In nearly every instance he had

carried his point, and either captured or beaten his adversaries by a story so apt, so on all fours, and with such complete answers that the controversy was over. I remember eleven of these stories, each of which was a victory.

In regard to this story-telling, he said: "I am accused of telling a great many stories. They say that it lowers the dignity of the presidential office, but I have found that plain people (repeating with emphasis plain people), take them as you find them, are more easily influenced by a broad and humorous illustration than in any other way, and what the hypocritical few may think, I don't care."

In speaking Mr. Lincoln had a peculiar cadence in his voice, caused by laying emphasis upon the key-word of the sentence. In answer to the question how he knew so many anecdotes, he answered: "I never invented a story, but I have a good memory and, I think, tell one tolerably well. My early life was passed among pioneers who had the courage and enterprise to break away from civilization and settle in the wilderness. The things which happened to these original people and among themselves in their primitive conditions were far more dramatic than anything invented by the professional story-tellers. For many years I travelled the circuit as a lawyer, and usually there was only one hotel in the county towns where court was held. The judge, the grand and petit juries, the lawyers, the clients, and witnesses would pass the night telling exciting or amusing occurrences, and these were of infinite variety and interest." He was always eager for a new story to add to his magazine of ammunition and weapons.

One night when there was a reception at the executive mansion Rufus C. Andrews, surveyor of the port of New York, and I went there together. Andrews was a good lawyer and had been a correspondent in New York of Mr. Lincoln, while he was active at the bar in Illinois. He was a confidential adviser of the president on New York matters and frequently at the executive mansion. As the procession moved past the president he stopped Andrews and, leaning over, spoke very confidentially to him. The

conversation delayed the procession for some time. When Andrews and I returned to the hotel, our rooms were crowded with newspaper men and politicians wanting to know what the confidential conversation was about. Andrews made a great mystery of it and so did the press. He explained to me when we were alone that during his visit to the president the night before he told the president a new story. The president delayed him at the reception, saying: "Andrews, I forgot the point of that story you told me last night; repeat it now."

The first national convention I ever attended was held in Baltimore in 1864, when Mr. Lincoln was renominated. I have since been four times a delegate at large, representing the whole State, and many times a delegate representing a congressional district. Judge W. H. Robertson, of Westchester County, and I went to the convention together. We thought we would go by sea, but our ship had a collision, and we were rescued by a pilot-boat. Returning to New York, we decided to accept the security of the railroad. Judge Robertson was one of the shrewdest and ablest of the Republican politicians in the State of New York. He had been repeatedly elected county judge, State senator, and member of Congress, and always overcoming a hostile Democratic majority.

We went to Washington to see Mr. Seward first, had an interview with him at his office, and dined with him in the evening. To dine with Secretary Seward was an event which no one, and especially a young politician, ever forgot. He was the most charming of hosts and his conversation a liberal education.

There was no division as to the renomination of Mr. Lincoln, but it was generally conceded that the vice-president should be a war Democrat. The candidacy of Daniel S. Dickinson, of New York, had been so ably managed that he was far and away the favorite. He had been all his life, up to the breaking out of the Civil War, one of the most pronounced extreme and radical Democrats in the State of New York. Mr. Seward took Judge Robertson and me into his confidence. He was hostile to the nomi-

nation of Mr. Dickinson, and said that the situation demanded the nomination for vice-president of a representative from the border States, whose loyalty had been demonstrated during the war. He eulogized Andrew Johnson, of Tennessee, and gave a glowing description of the courage and patriotism with which Johnson, at the risk of his life, had advocated the cause of the Union and kept his State partially loyal. He said to us: "You can quote me to the delegates, and they will believe I express the opinion of the president. While the president wishes to take no part in the nomination for vice-president, yet he favors Mr. Johnson."

When we arrived at the convention this interview with Mr. Seward made us a centre of absorbing interest and at once changed the current of opinion, which before that had been almost unanimously for Mr. Dickinson. It was finally left to the New York delegation.

The meeting of the delegates from New York was a stormy one and lasted until nearly morning. Mr. Dickinson had many warm friends, especially among those of previous Democratic affiliation, and the State pride to have a vice-president was in his favor. Upon the final vote Andrew Johnson had one majority. The decision of New York was accepted by the convention and he was nominated for vice-president.

This is an instance of which I have met many in my life, where the course of history was changed on a very narrow margin. Political histories and the newspapers' discussions of the time assigned the success of Mr. Johnson to the efforts of several well-known delegates, but really it was largely, if not wholly, due to the message of Mr. Seward, which was carried by Judge Robertson and myself to the delegates.

The delays in the prosecution of the war had created a sentiment early in 1864 that the re-election of Mr. Lincoln was impossible. The leaders of both the conservative and the radical elements in the Republican party, Mr. Weed on the one hand, and Mr. Greeley on the other, frankly told the president that he could not be re-elected, and his intimate friend, Congressman Elihu B. Washburne, after

a canvass of the country, gave him the same information.

Then came the spectacular victory of Farragut at Mobile and the triumphant march of Sherman through Georgia, and the sentiment of the country entirely changed. There was an active movement on foot in the interest of the secretary of the treasury, Chase, and fostered by him, to hold an independent convention before the regular Republican convention as a protest against the renomination of Mr. Lincoln. It was supported by some of the most eminent and powerful members of the party who threw into the effort their means and influence. After these victories the effort was abandoned and Mr. Lincoln was nominated by acclamation. I recall as one of the excitements and pleasures of a lifetime the enthusiastic confidence of that convention when they acclaimed Lincoln their nominee.

Governor Seymour, who was the idol of his party, headed the New York delegation to the national Democratic convention to nominate the president, and his journey to that convention was a triumphal march. There is no doubt that at the time he had with him not only the enthusiastic support of his own party but the confidence of the advocates of peace. His own nomination and election seemed inevitable. However, in deference to the war sentiment, General McClellan was nominated instead, and here occurred one of those little things which so often in our country have turned the tide.

The platform committee, and the convention afterwards permitted to go into the platform a phrase proposed by Clement C. Vallandigham, of Ohio, the phrase being, "The war is a failure." Soon after the adjournment of the convention, to the victories of Farragut and Sherman was added the spectacular campaign and victory of Sheridan in the valley of Shenandoah. The campaign at once took on a new phase. It was the opportunity for the orator.

It is difficult now to recreate the scenes of that campaign. The people had been greatly disheartened. Every family was in bereavement, with a son lost and others still in the service. Taxes were onerous,

and economic and business conditions very bad. Then came this reaction, which seemed to promise an early victory for the Union. The orator naturally picked up the phrase, "The war is a failure"; then he pictured Farragut tied to the shrouds of his flag-ship; then he portrayed Sherman marching through Georgia, and the glee-club sang the well-known song "Marching Through Georgia"; then he pictured Sheridan leaving the War Department hearing of the battle in the Shenandoah Valley, riding down and rallying his defeated troops, reforming and leading them to one of the most important victories of the war; then would be recited the famous poem "Sheridan Twenty Miles Away." Every occasion was the opportunity of the descriptive and imaginative orator.

Mr. Lincoln's election under the conditions and circumstances was probably more due to that unfortunate phrase in the Democratic platform than to any other cause.

The tragedy of the assassination of Mr. Lincoln was followed by the most pathetic incident of American life—his funeral. After the ceremony at Washington the funeral-train stopped at Philadelphia, New York, and Albany. In each of these cities was an opportunity for the people to view the remains.

I had charge in my official capacity as secretary of state of the train after it left Albany. It was late in the evening when we started, and the train was running all night through central and western New York. Its schedule was well known along the route. Wherever the highway crossed the railway-track the whole population of the neighborhood was assembled on the highway and in the fields. Huge bonfires lighted up the scene. Pastors of the local churches of all denominations had united in leading their congregations for greeting and farewell for their beloved president. As we would reach a crossing there sometimes would be hundreds and at others thousands of men, women, and children on their knees, praying and singing hymns.

This continuous service of prayer and song and supplication lasted over the three hundred miles between Albany and Buffalo, from midnight until dawn.

(To be continued.)

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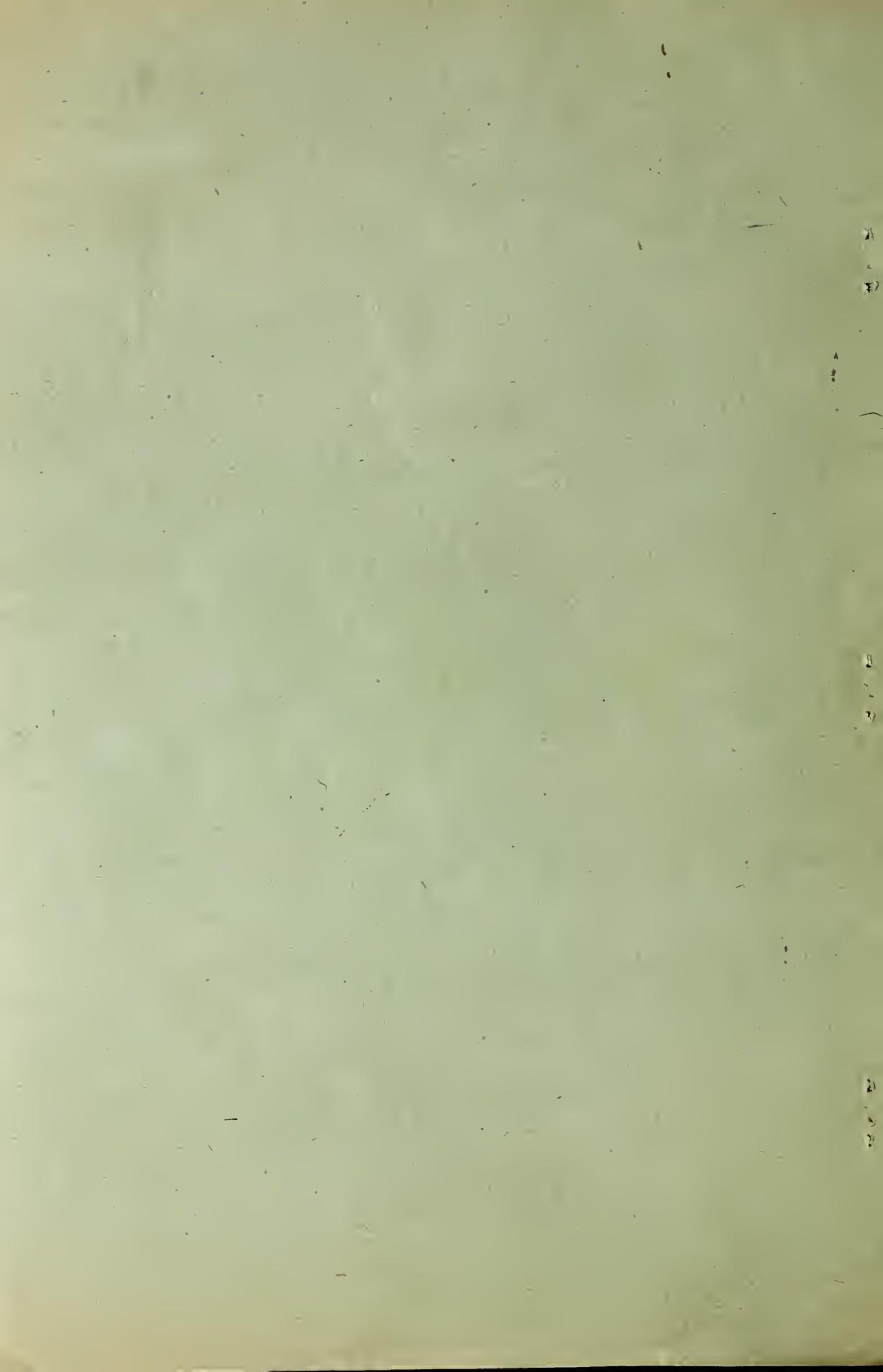
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